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Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Arms

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Following is an address by Ambassador Paul H. Nitze, Special Adviser to the President and Secretary of State on Arms Control Matters, before the Foreign Service Institute Symposium on "The Future of Start," Arlington, Virginia, March 13, 1986.

After last November's summit meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, we thought that the summit and the events leading up to it might well foreshadow the possibility for a fresh start in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. We were fully aware, however, of the substantial barriers to agreement which remained to be surmounted.

On March 4 our negotiators concluded the fourth round of the nuclear and space arms talks (NST) in Geneva. This was preceded by Gorbachev's January 15 announcement of a new Soviet arms control proposal. In late February, after extensive consultations with our allies, the President authorized our negotiators in Geneva to present a comprehensive response to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal.

It is appropriate to recall the main outlines of Mr. Gorbachev's proposal and those of the President's response, as well as such clarifications as our negotiators have been able to obtain from the Soviet negotiators in Geneva.

I will first address the initial steps as they have been set forth by both sides. Agreements concerning the first steps and the manner in which they are executed will largely determine what is possible in subsequent stages.

One of the features of Mr. Gorbachev's proposal was his attempt to trump the President's emphasis on the goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons by offering a staged timetable to achieve that goal. But the second and third stages of his proposal can only be agreed and implemented by a multilateral group of nations including the United Kingdom, France, China, and other industrial nations as well. Furthermore, for those steps to become practicable, with no diminution of the security of the United States and its allies, a number of changes must first take place in the world scene. There must be a correction in today's imbalances in non-nuclear capabilities; an elimination of chemical warfare capabilities; an improvement in the methods of handling conditions of tension in the world, such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Angola; and a demonstration that the Soviet Union has reconciled itself to peaceful competition.

With regard to the first steps, there appeared to be some new elements in the position of the Soviet side. On INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces], the Soviets appeared to have shifted somewhat their position on British and French nuclear forces. Because the INF proposals represent the most tangible movement resulting from Mr. Gorbachev's package, because the U.S. February initiative focuses on INF, and because these movements ultimately affect prospects in START [strategic arms reduction talks], I will later provide some elaboration of developments in this area. Mr. Gorbachev also expressed at least rhetorical support for more extensive verification measures than the Soviets have supported in the past. Finally, a first reading of the English text of Gorbachev's proposal indicated there might be a change in their position calling for a ban on strategic defense research; this, however, like several other indications of change, later turned out to be illusory.

START

But before getting into such areas of change in the positions of the two sides, let me review the basic position of the United States in the three NST negotiating groups and the status of our discussions with the Soviets. In START, the U.S. position reflects the summit joint statement commitment toward "the principle of 50 percent reductions in the nuclear arms of the U.S. and U.S.S.R., appropriately applied...."

- Reentry vehicles (RVs) on ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles] and SLBMs [submarine-launched ballistic missiles] would be reduced to a limit of 4,500—about 50% below current levels.
- Reentry vehicles on ICBMs would be reduced to 3,000—about 50% below the current Soviet level and roughly halfway between our earlier proposal for a limit of 2,500 and a limit of 3,600 proposed by the Soviets.

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• The highest overall strategic ballistic missile throw-weight of either side would be reduced by 50%, in this case, from the Soviet level of 11.9 million pounds. (By way of comparison, the United States has 4.4 million pounds.)

• Contingent upon acceptance of RV and throw-weight limits, the United States would accept equal limits of 1,500 on the number of long-range ALCMs [air-launched cruise missiles] carried by U.S. and Soviet heavy bombers—about 50% below planned U.S. deployment levels.

The United States cannot agree to one common limit on ballistic missile RVs and bomber weapons, as proposed by the Soviets. If one counted ALCMs, short-range attack missiles, and gravity bombs as equivalent to Soviet ballistic missile RVs—despite the massive Soviet air defenses faced by U.S. bombers and the far lower readiness rate of bombers compared to ballistic missiles—the United States would be significantly penalized. But if the Soviets were to accept our proposed limit of 4,500 RVs along with our proposed limit of 1,500 ALCMs, it would result in reduction to a total of 6,000 ballistic missiles RVs and ALCMs on each side. This total constitutes the same number proposed by the Soviets for the overall limit on "nuclear charges" but would include a more appropriate definition of which systems reflect the strategic balance.

With respect to strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, the United States has proposed a reduction in strategic ballistic missiles to a limit of 1,250–1,450, or about 40–45% below the current higher Soviet level. In this context, the United States could accept further reduction of heavy bomber limits to 350 (compared to our earlier proposal of 400)—about 40% below the current U.S. SALT [strategic arms limitation talks]-accountable level.

For reasons similar to those applying to an RV and ALCM aggregate, the United States cannot agree to the Soviet proposal to include in a single aggregate strategic ballistic missiles and heavy bombers. However, if agreement were reached on a range of 1,250–1,450 for ICBMs and SLBMs, and on heavy bomber limits of 350, it would result in reduction of the total of strategic ballistic missiles and heavy bombers to between 1,600 and 1,800.

"Build-down" is our suggested means of implementing the agreed reductions. We are prepared to begin working out details of a reductions schedule as soon as agreement can be achieved on the endpoints to be reached at the completion of the first stage.

The U.S. proposal also contains a ban on the development and deployment of all new heavy strategic ballistic missiles and on the modernization of existing heavy missiles due to the destabilizing character of such systems. All mobile ICBMs would also be banned because of significant verification difficulties and inherent asymmetries in deployment opportunities between the sides.

Round 4 of the NST negotiations was not productive with respect to START. Mr. Gorbachev's January 15 proposal did not include any changes in the Soviet position regarding START, and the Soviet negotiators at Geneva neither responded adequately to the possibilities raised by the U.S. initiative at the end of the previous round nor did they introduce any new ideas of their own.

A large boulder on the path to progress in START has been the continuing Soviet insistence on defining strategic weapons as those systems capable of striking the territory of the other side. In addition to those central systems that the United States considers to be strategic, the Soviet definition of strategic delivery vehicles would also cover, on the U.S. side, all our LRINF [longer range intermediate-range nuclear forces] missiles, 340 "medium-range" dual-capable aircraft deployed in Europe and Asia, and 540 attack aircraft deployed on all 14 U.S. aircraft carriers, while 2,000–3,000 comparable Soviet nuclear delivery vehicles, including some 300 Backfire bombers, would not be so counted. Were the United States to retain equality in strategic nuclear delivery vehicles under the Soviet definition, we would have to cut LRINF missiles and dual-capable aircraft at sea and on land to 430—20% of the current Soviet global level. If the United States were to retain LRINF missiles and dual-capable aircraft at current levels, we would have to cut strategic nuclear delivery vehicles to less than half the allowed Soviet number.

The Soviets proposed this inequitable definition of "strategic" during the early stages of the SALT I and SALT II negotiations. In both cases, they eventually withdrew their definition and agreed to a "central systems" approach to defining the systems subject to limitations in the agreements—that is, to ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. We hope and expect that they will do so again. Until they do, prospects for progress on START will be severely encumbered.

I have mentioned the disputed issue of how bomber weapons should be handled. Another issue between the sides concerns the handling of sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs). The Soviets contend that all cruise missiles with ranges over 600 kilometers, including SLCMs, should be banned. Yet the Soviets do not answer our questions about how such a ban could be verified and do not acknowledge that such an outcome would leave the United States, much of whose population and industry is within range of shorter-range SLCMs, much more vulnerable to attack from residual systems than the Soviet Union.

Another issue inhibiting progress in START is the Soviet demand for agreement to a ban on "space-strike arms" as a prerequisite even to serious negotiation on measures to limit strategic offensive systems. We regard such a precondition as unacceptable on its merits; we also believe serious negotiations in all three groups should proceed concurrently. We do not dispute the interrelationship between strategic offensive and strategic defensive areas. In fact, it was the United States which first drew this connection during SALT I. With these considerations in mind, I will turn briefly to the defense and space negotiating group.

Defense and Space

With respect to defense and space, the United States has made clear that we are committed to the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] research program, which is being carried out in full compliance with the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty. We are seeking to explore with the Soviets how a cooperative transition toward a more defense-reliant regime could be accomplished, should new defensive technologies prove feasible, but the Soviet negotiators have resisted even discussing the subject with us. We are also proposing that the Soviets join us even now in an "open laboratories" arrangement under which both sides would provide information on each other's strategic defense research programs and provide reciprocal opportunities for visiting associated research facilities and laboratories.

As in START, there was no tangible progress during round 4 in defense and space. We initially thought it might be otherwise. The English text of Mr. Gorbachev's proposal at the opening of the round made no reference to "research"; the word "research" did not appear in it. Later, however, we found

that the Russian text uses the word "*sozdaniye*" which is generally translated as "create" and which they claim includes "purposeful research." Soviet negotiators have explained that Mr. Gorbachev had intended no change whatsoever in the Soviet position on what they call "space-strike arms."

We have had great difficulty in the defense and space talks in even getting the Soviets to acknowledge indisputable facts. The Soviets refuse to admit the nature and extensive scope of their own strategic defense research and development activities; they deliberately distort the nature and scope of the U.S. SDI program. If there are grounds for encouragement in this forum, they can only be found in the grudging admissions occasionally made by Soviet officials in informal discussions that the logic and coherence of official Soviet positions are flawed and/or inconsistent with the public statements of General Secretary Gorbachev.

INF

The commitment by both sides at the summit toward early progress on an interim INF agreement, the inherent flexibility in the INF portion of the American proposal of November 1, and the apparent movement in the Soviet INF negotiating position heralded by Gorbachev in mid-January raised expectations about the possibilities for success in reaching an INF agreement. The United States studied carefully the Soviets' January proposal and probed Soviet negotiators on the details behind this proposal. We also consulted intensively with allied governments in preparing an appropriate response.

Some elements in Gorbachev's proposal on INF seemed to be constructive. The Soviets appeared to have dropped their demand that British and French SLBM nuclear warheads be counted equally and along with U.S. LRINF warheads. The Soviets expressed willingness to accept an outcome involving reductions of all U.S. and Soviet LRINF missiles in Europe, including the SS-20s, to zero. The potentially positive impact of this proposal was negated, however, by a number of unacceptable conditions and omissions related to the offer. Among the conditions are:

- A nontransfer provision calling on the United States to assume an obligation not to transfer strategic and medium-range missiles to third countries. This, of course, is aimed directly at longstanding programs of cooperation the United States has with its allies and would signal the end of the U.K. Trident modernization program; and
- A demand that the United Kingdom and France not "build up" their "corresponding nuclear arms" and declare their intent to begin to eliminate those forces in stage 2. The Soviets know that a ban on strategic modernization would sooner rather than later spell the demise of British and French SLBM forces.

Among the omissions are:

- The absence of a provision for reductions in SS-20s in the eastern part of the U.S.S.R. until a subsequent stage and until after U.S. LRINF missiles in Europe have been reduced to zero; and
- The absence of a provision limiting SRINF [shorter range intermediate-range nuclear forces] missiles. If LRINF missiles were reduced to zero, the effect could be circumvented by SRINF deployments, which can cover most of the important targets in NATO Europe when forward deployed in Eastern Europe.

The consequence of accepting the Soviet proposal would be the elimination of U.S. LRINF missiles from Europe and the probable deterioration of U.K. and French nuclear deterrents, but without elimination of the SS-20 threat which our friends and allies in both Europe and Asia face.

Our study of the Gorbachev proposal in detail and in its overall effect caused us to conclude, based on both the manner of presentation and the substance, that it had been designed primarily for its political and propaganda impact. We do not wish, however, to leave any stone unturned in the search for progress in Geneva. We take seriously the commitment undertaken in the summit joint statement to accelerate efforts to find common ground between the positions of the two sides. It is for these reasons that the President authorized in late February the tabling of a new U.S. INF proposal.

The United States continues to believe that the best solution in INF remains the global elimination of the entire class of U.S. and Soviet LRINF missiles. When we first proposed this idea at the opening of the INF negotiations in 1981, the Soviets accused us of wanting something for nothing, of offering to destroy paper missiles in exchange for the destruction of real missiles. But by the end of 1985, the United States had deployed 236 LRINF missiles in Europe. Absent an INF agreement, that number will continue to grow until the full operational capability of 572 missiles is reached by the end of 1988. All five NATO basing countries are acting in accordance with the commitments made in the 1979 NATO dual-track decision. Thus, contrary to Soviet criticism, the plan offered by the United States in February 1986 to eliminate all LRINF missiles worldwide by the end of the decade is both new and significant.

The United States has proposed a detailed, phased approach for reaching its objective, which would achieve balance at the earliest possible time while maintaining stability throughout the reductions process.

By the end of 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union would reduce their LRINF missile deployments in Europe to 140 launchers each, with the Soviet Union making concurrent proportionate reductions in Asia.

Within the following year, both sides would further reduce the numbers of LRINF missile launchers remaining in Europe and Asia by an additional 50%. Finally, both sides would move to the total elimination of this category of weapons by the end of 1989.

Associated with this plan, there would be a parallel series of global LRINF missile warhead ceilings under which the United States would retain the right to global warhead equality. As Soviet SS-20 launchers were reduced, the launchers and their associated missiles and agreed support equipment would be destroyed. U.S. systems in excess of the launcher limits cited above could be withdrawn to the continental United States unless or until they were also in excess of the equal global warhead ceiling associated with the launcher reductions then being implemented, in which case they would be destroyed.

These reductions and limits would involve U.S. and Soviet systems only. There would be no agreed constraints on the forces of the United Kingdom or France.

These reductions would also be accompanied by constraints on SRINF, either establishing a ceiling at current Soviet levels or at the levels both sides had on January 1, 1982. This ceiling would enter into effect by the end of 1987.

By insisting that Soviet reductions to 140 LRINF missile launchers in Europe would have to occur before the

United States would reduce below that level, we seek to avoid near-term military and political problems and to ensure that at no point during the reduction process would the Soviets be able to achieve a lasting advantage.

I have dealt with INF issues in some detail because an agreement in this negotiating group could precede and influence an agreement in START. Likewise, Soviet willingness to make arms control progress before the next summit and to fulfill their commitment toward early progress focused on the principle of 50% reductions may be manifested first or perhaps only in INF.

Verification

The United States continues to stress the critical importance of agreeing to effective means of verification so as to be able to assess with confidence compliance with provisions of any arms control agreements which are negotiated. Thus, Mr. Gorbachev's positive statements on verification in his January 15 article were welcomed throughout the West. However, past Soviet reluctance to agree on measures necessary to verify compliance provided grounds for some skepticism as well. Round 4 provided little evidence that Soviet attitudes on verification have undergone fundamental change. The Soviets neither agreed to nor proposed specific verification measures in either the START or INF groups. We expect that Soviet sincerity regarding verification will be put to a clear test when the negotiations resume in May. At that time, our INF negotiators will continue presentation of specific verification procedures tailored to the specific weaponry limits we seek. These details are being presented in the context of a comprehensive verification regime which includes the use of national technical means of verification and cooperative measures between the two governments, such as onsite inspection and data exchanges.

Conclusion

My remarks today have reflected the lack of constructive activity by the Soviet START delegation during round 4 of the nuclear and space arms talks. I do not wish to imply by this negative report that I cannot imagine significant START progress in the months to come. The Soviets have abandoned their current definition of strategic systems before. They can do so again.

We also believe that reductions in strategic offensive systems would be mutually advantageous whether or not strategic defenses are deployed and that there are considerable opportunities for equitable offense-offense tradeoffs. Despite the significant differences in the two sides' application of the 50% reductions principle, the United States sees a potential for convergence on several issues, including reductions in ICBM warheads, total ballistic missile warheads, ballistic missile throw-weight, and the total number of ballistic missiles and heavy bombers to be permitted.

However, the Soviet side, rather than engaging in specific discussions of these issues directed toward narrowing remaining qualitative and numerical differences between us, has emphasized public rhetoric rather than taking concrete steps at the confidential negotiating table where the Soviets have elected to restrict themselves to abstractions and generalities. The Soviets have turned aside our efforts to expand areas of commonality. As long as they remain frozen in this approach, no significant progress is possible.

The primary missing element in the Soviet negotiating formula for START is a willingness to take into account Western interests and not just their own. Were that attitude to change, major progress toward a START agreement would not be far behind. ■

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